

The Foulis Press

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The first printing press in Scotland had been set up in Edinburgh in 1508, but it was not until 1638 that printing was introduced to Glasgow. George Anderson, an Edinburgh printer, opened a printing establishment there at the invitation of the Town Council and the University of Glasgow. The introduction of printing to Glasgow thus also marked the beginning of the Glasgow University Press.

The quality of early Scottish printing was poor in all respects, with low standards of design and typography, paper stock and proof-reading. Until the mid eighteenth century Scottish printers were no match for their European counterparts. This was a reflection of the generally impoverished state of Scotland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when resources were too scarce to permit the widespread printing and purchase of books. The turning point in Scotland's economic and social conditions came with the Act of Union in 1707.

From the early eighteenth century Glasgow was home to several printers, although only one, Robert Urie, produced work of any quality before Robert Foulis set up his own press and became Printer to the University. Glasgow was not yet a large city—its population in the 1740s has been estimated at around fifteen thousand. But in the mid eighteenth century it fostered a flowering of Scottish intellectual and cultural life that was to have a profound impact abroad, through the work of such figures as Adam Smith, David Hume, Allan Ramsay and William Adam. Glasgow University was a fertile and stimulating environment thanks to a gifted body of teachers, notable among whom was Francis Hutcheson, Professor of Moral Philosophy from 1729 to 1746. He was the teacher and friend of Robert and Andrew Foulis and was instrumental in securing for the Foulis Press the appointment as Printer to the University.

Andrew Faulls (also spelled Faulds) was a Glasgow brewer whose two eldest sons, Robert and Andrew, were born in 1707 and 1712. The brothers became partners in the Foulis Press, which produced some of the finest printing in eighteenth-century Europe and was highly influential in title-page design and matters of typography. At some point

From July to September 1989 the Turnbull Room featured an exhibition of eighteenth century books from the Foulis Press, Glasgow. Robert Foulis began publishing in 1740, and the Press continued to operate until 1799. The books on display, all from the Turnbull Library's collections, spanned the years 1742 to 1785.